



The Cabin Connection

A publication of the Asset Inspection Division of the Texas General Land Office • Jerry Patterson, Commissioner

August 2010

A Message from Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson



Welcome to the Summer 2010 edition of Cabin Connection.

It's been another busy year at the Texas General Land Office, and the Cabin Program continues to be one of the agency's most popular and successful programs. This edition features an article thanking you, the permit holder, for working with the staff on several accomplishments over the last decade.

There's also information about ongoing research concerning the migration of spotted seatrout and how you can help if you catch one of these tagged fish. In addition, your photos and some of your stories are featured in this edition.

Finally, we have some information about how you can be a part of an upcoming book that will focus on cabins along the Texas coast.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, concerns, or ideas for improvement. Land Office staff members look forward to hearing from you. Have a great summer.

JERRY PATTERSON
Commissioner, Texas General Land Office

Wildlife Focus – Sharing the Bay

Currently, the Texas General Land Office leases some of the islands where birds nest in Texas bays to Audubon Texas, which works to enhance nesting habitats. The Land Office has worked closely with both the nonprofit organization and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department over the past year to ensure bay users can enjoy Coastal Public Land while Audubon Texas works to protect nesting birds. No islands with cabin permits are included in the Audubon leases.

During the February-August nesting season, Audubon Texas restricts public access to islands it leases. Signs, usually bright yellow, are located on the edges of the islands to inform bay users that public access restrictions are in effect during the nesting season. Although the water around these islands can be accessed, it is a violation of state and federal law to disturb nesting waterbirds.

Unfortunately, as human recreational use of local bays increases, the number of nesting Colonial Waterbirds is decreasing in some areas. This is often caused by human disturbance, and in many cases, people do not realize they are disturbing nesting birds. Often times, bay users will land a boat or kayak on an island with nesting birds or wade in the water near an island with nesting birds.

These unintentional disturbances can deter birds from select-

ing the island, or worse, can cause nesting birds to flush from their nests. Even a few minutes away from eggs and young chicks can be enough time for them to be lost to predators or the scorching Texas sun. Numerous birds flying from an island during nesting season is a sure sign they are being disturbed.

All bay systems and islands are different, but the easiest solution is to give nesting birds a wide berth.

For more information about Audubon Texas, please visit its website at <http://www.tx.audubon.org/Coastal.html>.



Roseate Spoonbills in the bay. Photo courtesy of Dave and Liz Smith.

Fishing Cabins of the Upper Laguna Madre

Dr. David McKee, a professor at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, who is also a long time permit holder, and Dr. Liz Smith, a TAMU-CC Associate Research Scientist, are compiling information for a book about the Texas General Land Office Cabin Program and they need your help. The book will focus on the cabins in the Upper Laguna Madre where one-half of all the cabins are located along the Texas coast. The book will de-

scribe the history and success of this unique program, told through your photographs and stories. Please look through your old photographs and write down any special stories you would like to share. You can send them to Dr. Liz Smith at Elizabeth.Smith@tamucc.edu. McKee and Smith will be sending out more information in the near future asking for specific information. You can also send them an e-mail if you would like more information on this project.

Contacts for the Texas General Land Office Cabin Program

Amy Nuñez
Cabin Coordinator
361-825-3038

6300 Ocean Dr., Unit 5848
Corpus Christi, TX 78412-5848
Fax: 361-825-3040

Austin
General Land Office
P.O. Box 12873
Austin, Texas 78711-2873

Attn: Julie Fielder
Phone: 512-475-2281
Fax: 512-463-5304

1-800-998-4GLO
or email
cabins@glo.state.tx.us

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Please send us photographs, stories, recipes or any other items of interest for future newsletters. We welcome your input.

Cabin Program Thriving Despite Hurricane Damages

The Texas General Land Office Cabin Program is one of the most successful and popular programs at the agency. But a program is only as good as the people involved in it, and permit holders are what make this one so unique and special.

The partnership with permit holders is invaluable to the Land Office. In many cases, permit holders are the front line, providing staff members with information about events that occur on the coast, and photos and documentation when needed.

Permit holders have set a fine example in responding to hurricanes Claudette (2003), Dolly (2008) and Ike (2008), which heavily damaged many cabin structures. Permit holders removed debris, rebuilt structures within their approved footprints, and brought older structures into compliance. Several even worked with staff members

to install solar panels and small-scale wind turbines. As a result, many rebuilt cabins are in better condition than ever.

Meanwhile, the Land Office will continue to work with permit holders who are finishing the rebuilding process after the most recent storms. The staff has worked hard to keep fees level in these hard economic times through constant review of the agency's associated costs.

Sealed bid offerings will also continue, allowing more people into the program. To date, three successful bid offerings have been held, with a total of 11 new permit holders added.

The Land Office staff looks forward to getting feedback from permit holders on how to improve the Cabin Program. Working together, the Land Office and permit holders can ensure the success of this popular program.

Tips to Remember

- In case of emergencies, please keep these numbers handy: VHF channel 16, 911 and your local county sheriff's number: Brazoria (979) 864-2392, Jackson (361) 782-3371, Calhoun (361) 553-4646, Aransas (361) 729-2222, Nueces (361) 887-2222, Kleberg (361) 595-8500, Kenedy (361) 294-5205, Willacy (956) 689-5576 and Cameron (956) 554-6700.
- Remember to wear flotation devices when boating, especially if you're alone on the water.
- Avoid disturbing nesting waterbirds from February 15th to September 1st every year. Bird disturbance is a violation of state and federal law.
- In case of hurricanes and to lessen the chance of thefts or break-ins, please keep your belongings safely stored inside the cabin or storage shed and remember to lock all doors and windows.
- Burning trash and debris at the cabin site is strictly prohibited by the cabin contract and can result in possible termination of your permit.
- Cabins are to be used for recreational purposes only. Direct or indirect commercial use of the cabin may result in termination of your cabin permit. Please call the Texas General Land Office if you need any clarification.
- Any changes that alter the square footage of the cabin or associated structures require prior written approval. Send amendment requests to the Land Office well in advance of your proposed start date.
- All spoil islands are subject to future dredge placements by the Army Corps of Engineers (COE). Land Office staff members have worked diligently to establish a cooperative relationship with the COE and expect to receive prior notification of dredging activities when possible. The staff will inform permit holders of upcoming dredging events and work with anyone whose cabin is impacted by dredging. The COE dredging plan for the Laguna Madre can be found at <http://www.swg.usace.army.mil/items/laguna>.
- The Land Office will continue to work with permit holders who are rebuilding after hurricanes Ike and Dolly. If you need a time extension to complete rebuilding, please send your request to cabins@glo.state.tx.us or call (361) 825-3038.
- Please keep the cabin and associated structures in good repair and safe condition at all times.
- Please send the Land Office your updated e-mail address. You should be receiving at least two e-mails a year from the agency. If you are not, send an e-mail to cabins@glo.state.tx.us along with your permit number so we can update your information.
- The Land Office does not have jurisdiction over floating cabins. If you have any questions or concerns about the Floater Program, please contact Texas Parks and Wildlife at (512) 389-4850.

The Shack

by William B. Cooper (PC1315)

My father was always an avid fisherman. Every year in Arkansas, when the Ouachita River would back up and spill out into the surrounding pine forest, my father would paddle for fisherman who came from all over. Later, my father took me to these same areas with his father, and those are special memories I will always cherish.

After we moved to Cuero, my father was taken to Port O'Connor to go fishing with one of his friends. I remember the gleam in his eye and the excitement in his voice when he got home and showed me the redfish and trout he caught. "Son, you will never believe how much power these redfish have. I have never caught anything like it." He was hooked and never went freshwater fishing again. He took me fishing soon after that and I got to experience the same thrill of feeling a 5-10 pound redfish stripping line off your spool while all you can do is hang on until it tires enough to turn.

One of my dad's friends got the rights to build a shack (cabin) on one of the islands along Big Bayou that summer, and we helped him build it. My dad asked if he could have the first crack at the cabin if he ever gave up his rights to it.

On one of our fishing trips, we were cruising down Big Bayou coming back to Port O'Connor, and my dad saw smoke coming from one of the shacks near Bill Day Reef. We stopped to check out the small fire, and if we had not arrived when we did, the shack would have burned down. Dad knew the man — Mr. Warwas, from Cuero — who had the rights to the cabin and let him know what happened.

We moved to Austin after several years and my father and I still went fishing in Port O'Connor regularly. We found out that dad's old friend, whose cabin we had helped build, was selling the rights. But much to my dad's disappointment, he gave the rights to someone else. My father was deeply hurt and as far as I know they never talked again after that.

But faith shined down on us as Mr. Warwas wanted to give up his rights to his cabin. He remembered how my father had saved his shack and offered him the rights. It was 1978 and my father finally had found his favorite place on earth. For the next 29 years, my father taught another generation of friends and family how to fish Port O'Connor and spent most of his time after he retired either fishing or sitting on the front porch of his shack.

In 2003, Hurricane Claudette hit Port O'Connor and a twister that formed destroyed a swath of shacks along Big Bayou. Ours was one of the shacks destroyed. Over the next year, my friends

and I rebuilt the shack, and even though my father's health was beginning to deteriorate rapidly at that point, it was good to see him enjoy a few more years there. Although the new shack was bigger and better, I don't believe

my father ever loved it the way he did the original one. In his heart, nothing could ever take the place of his old beloved shack.

In 2006, his best friend and fishing buddy, Elton, passed away. He was cremated and some of his ashes went to our shack. We put him in an urn over the mantle right next to his picture. The following year my father passed away as well. I never knew anyone who died with so much dignity. He had a smile on his face and consoled the people who were grieving for him. He even told the nurse when he arrived at the hospital, knowing he was dying, "Honey, my bags are packed and I'm ready to go."

My dad was cremated, and at his wake held at the shack were all the people he had taught to love the coast as much as he did. We told stories and celebrated his life. We laughed and we cried and sang Amazing Grace.

My brother-in-law who had spent so much time down there learning to fish with my father was devastated and told me how much of a father my dad had been to him. He had been raised by his mother and until he met my father and spent so much time learning about fishing and life with him, had not had that type of relationship in his life. My brother-in-law is a heck of a fisherman these days.

Now at the shack, that I love and care for like my father did, sits an urn with two sets of ashes: my father and his best friend Elton. Next to that urn is an old picture of them sitting on the front porch telling grand fish stories. One day, when my time here is up, I want to join them on that mantle over the front door of "the shack."

Billy Clyde Cooper 1930 - 2007



The shack.

Louis Peetz

by Dr. David McKee (PC1111)

Few people know that Louis Peetz—"the Baron of Baffin"—recently passed away. He was from Corpus Christi and was a very familiar face in the upper lagoon from the 1960s until just before his death in Kerrville.

Louis was a member of the Ananias Fishing Club, formed in the 1940s. He was very "old lagoon" and was one of the last of the older kids—along with Paul Wimberly, Bill Graeber and Bill Malone—who started fishing with lagoon legends like Chatter Allen, Dr. Ford Allen, Smiley Davis and Dick McCracken in the Grave Yard/Nine Mile Hole when no one even knew it existed. Even the old timers said he was the best and toughest fisherman of them all.

Louis maintained a cabin on Twin Palms Island for many years and everyone down there knew and loved him dearly. He never wore shoes or a shirt and always had zinc oxide smeared on his nose and lips. He was a talented storyteller and always gathered a crowd whenever he told of days gone by and of past fishing trips in

the lagoon. He never kept secrets about where the fish were and "Peetzy" would even wave down passing boats when he was into fish because he loved to watch others have fun catching them. He always felt like there was plenty of water for everyone to fish if all would just use their heads.

I started fishing the lagoon in the late 1970s and was immediately introduced to Louis. He took me under his wing like he did everyone else who loved the lagoon and cabin life on the spoil islands. For quite a few years he held the Invitational Louis Peetz Memorial Day Tournament on Baffin, which was usually about 12-15 boats large. In 1985, the prizes for this prestigious tourney were an old red Lone Star Igloo missing its lid and a pair of 20+ year-old leaky waders that had long ago been retired by Chatter Allen. Life was meant to be fun and when you were around Louis he made sure it stayed that way. All who knew him will sorely miss Louis, who was truly one of the last of a rare breed.

Tracking Spotted Seatrout

by Laura Bivins, Biology Masters Student at TAMU-CC

Recent advances in technology have made it possible to track real-time movements of individual fish. Currently, adult spotted seatrout are being tracked with passive acoustic telemetry using stationary receivers that detect signals from fish implanted with uniquely coded transmitters. This method is widely used by researchers to record habitat usage and movement patterns of fish. The goal of this study is to surgically tag spotted seatrout to document their large-scale movement patterns and residency times between South Texas bays and nearshore waters.

There are currently 50 spotted seatrout tagged in South Texas waters in the Upper and Lower Laguna Madre, including Baffin Bay, with plans to tag a total of 80 fish. These fish have a green external dart tag near their dorsal fin and also carry an internal acoustic transmitter. If you catch one of these tagged fish, please **RELEASE** it to allow continued data collection and please **DO NOT REMOVE THE GREEN DART TAG**. Anglers who release tagged fish back into the wild and contact the researchers with capture information are eligible for prizes such as fishing rods, cash and other items. All you have to do is record the tag number, date, general location of capture, and your contact information and call the number listed on the green dart tag.

The continued support from local recreational guides, live release tournaments and anglers is much appreciated. For more information, please contact Laura.Bivins@tamucc.edu or visit the website at <http://www.fisheries.tamucc.edu/Trou tagging.html>.



Darrell Kouba and his niece, Anna, at PC1118 in Port O'Connor.

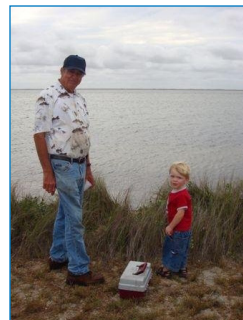


Relaxing after their fishing tournament is Fisher Dingee, Shuria Thompson, Reese Dingee, Misty Wiggs, Tim Seidler (PC1218), Cody Dingee, and Danny Wiggs.

Permit Holders



Cody Bates of PC1269 sent one of his favorite photos of his daughter, Adair, right across from the cabin in the land cut last summer.



Dwight Lankart of PC1454 sent this photo of Chris Fisk and his great-grandson Tommy Fuller overlooking the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway at marker 69.



From PC1216, Nancy Sutton sits with her grandson, Sebastian Sutton.



Mike McCraw of PC1276 took this photo of the cabin after Hurricane Dolly. His wife Jimmie designed the sturdy cabin using stainless steel hardware and double hurricane straps.